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THE CALL of THE SEA

L. FRANK TOOKER

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THE CALL OF THE SEA

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THE CALL OF THE SEA

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

L. FRANK TOOKER

NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1902

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THE CALL OF THE SEA

DAY and night I have heard it: "Arise and come to thine own!
The surf is loud on the shore, and the spume is white in the gale.
This is the rapture of living. Oh, how can the land atone
For the loss of the vibrant shrouds and the joy of the slanting sail?

"Follow, then, follow the free wind over the waste of gray!
The sweep of the billows shall rock thee, the scent of the brine shall allure;
Though Death and Oblivion mock thee, thou shalt joy in thy master's sway;
His scourging shall arm thee in might, make thee strong in thine hour to endure.

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"Oh, to be glad with the sea! to rejoice in the thunderous pour,
In the din, of the swift-falling waters! to feel the cool spray on thy cheek!
To lie in the hollowed hand of thy liege, with his spirit to soar,
Glad heir of adventurers gone, and comrade of those that yet seek!

"Over the rim of the world make thy uncertain quest;
Starlight shall mark thy course, fog and the spindrift bar;
Thou shalt exult in the storm, in the calm of the sea thou shalt rest;
Seek danger, and find it not; seek peace, and miss it afar.

"It will lift thee on wings as an eagle; it will be both singer and song;
A lamp to thy soul in need, a snare to thy wandering feet;
Blind to thy love or hate, it will save thee alone of a throng;
True to its own untruth, it will make thy ruin complete.

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"All thou hast hoped it gives, all thou hast lost is thine,
When, with thy face to the gale, thou ridest the storm in its wrath.
Winds in the shrouds are a harp, and the spray on thy face is as wine;
The roar of the waves is the voice of God, their hollows his path.

"What is thy pettiness then, in the face of this turbulent strife—
Sweep of the spendthrift seas, rush of the strenuous gale?
Buffeted, driven, alone, yet thy hand shall guard thy life,
Thy skill shall find thee a path, thy courage shall yet avail.

"Over the swinging sea, under the pendulous stars,
Rule thy unsteady world, thou the one steady thing!
Battling seas and gales, that would be thy prison bars,
Mold at thy will into bows, thee, their arrow, to fling!

"This is the secret we teach, this is the strength we inspire:
Set thy face to the fore, meet the confident hour;

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Alone, unseen of men, and far from thy heart's desire,
Take at one plunge this life's best gift, the test of thy power!"

Day and night I have heard it: "Arise and come to thine own!
The spume is like smoke in the blast, and the flaws are black on the lee.
Thou who art thrall to the winds that over the world are blown,
Rejoice in the harping gale, rejoice in the rolling sea!"

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"HE BRINGETH THEM UNTO THEIR DESIRED HAVEN"

I KNEW a much-loved mariner,
Who lies a fathom underground;
Above him now the grasses stir,
Two rose-trees set a bound.

From a high hill his grave looks out
Through sighing larches to the sea;
Now for the ocean's raucous rout
All June the humblebee

Drones round him on the lonely steeps,
And shy wood-creatures come and go
Above the green mound where he keeps
His silent watch below.

An elemental man was he—
Loved God, his wife, his children dear,
And fared through dangers of the sea
Without a sense of fear.

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And, loving nature, he was wise
In all the moods of wave and cloud;
Before the pageant of the skies
Nightly his spirit bowed;

Yet reckoned shrewdly with the gale,
And felt the viking's fierce delight
To face the north wind's icy hail,
Unmoved to thought of flight.

But wheresoe'er his prow was turned,
His thoughts, like homing pigeons, came
Back where his casement candle burned
Through many a league its flame.

Exiled from all he loved, at last
The summer gale has brought him home,
Where on the hillsides thickly massed
The elders break in foam.

The lonely highways that he knew
No longer hold him, nor the gale,
Sweeping the desolated blue,
Roars in his slanting sail.

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For he has grown a part of all
The winter silence of the hills;
For him the stately twilights fall,
The hemlock softly shrills

In mimicry of gales that woke
His vigilance off many a shore
Whereon the vibrant billows broke.
Now he awakes no more.

He wakes no more! Ah, me! his grief
Was ever that the sea had power
To hold from him the budding leaf,
The opening of the flower.

And so he hungered for the spring—
The hissing, furrow-turning plow,
The first thin notes the bluebirds sing,
The reddening of the bough.

Wave-deafened, many a night he stood
Upon his watery deck, and dreamed
Of thrushes singing in the wood,
And murmurous brooks that streamed

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Through silver shallows, and of bees
  Lulling the summer afternoon
With mellow trumpetings of ease,
  Of drowsiness the boon.

And dreamed of growing old at home,
  The wise Ulysses of his crew
Of children's children, who would roam
  With him the lands he knew;

And, wide-eyed, face with him the gale,
  And hear the slanting billows roar
Their diapason round his rail—
  All safe beside his door.

Now he has come into his own,—
  Sunshine and bird-song round the spot,
And scents from spicy woodlands blown,—
  Yet haply knows it not.

But round the grave where he doth keep,
  Unsolaced by regret or woe,
His narrowed heritage in sleep,
  The little children go.

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They shyly go without a sound,
  And read in reverent awe his name,
Until for them the very ground
  Doth blossom with his fame.

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THE LAST FIGHT

THAT night I think that no one slept;
No bells were struck, no whistle blew,
And when the watch was changed I crept
From man to man of all the crew
With whispered orders. Though we swept
Through roaring seas, we hushed the clock,
And muffled every clanking block.

So when one fool, unheeding, cried
Some petty order, straight I ran,
And threw him sprawling o'er the side.
All life is but a narrow span:
It little matters that one bide
A moment longer here, for all
Fare the same road, whate'er befall.

But vain my care; for when the day
Broke gray and wet, we saw the foe
But half a stormy league away.
By noon we saw his black bows throw
Five fathoms high a wall of spray;

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A little more, we heard the drum,
And knew that our last hour had come.

All day our crew had lined the side
With grim, set faces, muttering;
And once a boy (the first that died)
One of our wild songs tried to sing:
But when their first shot missed us wide,
A dozen sprang above our rail,
Shook fists, and roared a cursing hail.

Thereon, all hot for war, they bound
Their heads with cool, wet bands, and drew
Their belts close, and their keen blades ground;
Then, at the next gun's puff of blue,
We set the grog-cup on its round,
And pledged for life or pledged for death
Our last sigh of expiring breath.

Laughing, our brown young singer fell
As their next shot crashed through our rail;
Then 'twixt us flashed the fire of hell,
That shattered spar and riddled sail.
What ill we wrought we could not tell;
But blood-red all their scuppers dripped
When their black hull to starboard dipped.

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Nine times I saw our helmsman fall,
And nine times sent new men, who took
The whirling wheel as at death's call;
But when I saw the last one look
From sky to deck, then, reeling, crawl
Under the shattered rail to die,
I knew where I should surely lie.

I could not send more men to stand
And turn in idleness the wheel
Until they took death's beckoning hand,
While others, meeting steel with steel,
Flamed out their lives—an eager band,
Cheers on their lips, and in their eyes
The goal-rapt look of high emprise.

So to the wheel I went. Like bees
I heard the shot go darting by;
There came a trembling in my knees,
And black spots whirled about the sky.
I thought of things beyond the seas—
The little town where I was born,
And swallows twittering in the morn.

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A wounded creature drew him where
I grasped the wheel, and begged to steer.
It mattered not how he might fare
The little time he had for fear;
So if I left this to his care
He too might serve us yet, he said.
He died there while I shook my head.

I would not fall so like a dog,
My helpless back turned to the foe;
So when his great hulk, like a log,
Came surging past our quarter, lo!
With helm hard down, straight through the fog
Of battle smoke, and luffing wide,
I sent our sharp bow through his side.

The willing waves came rushing in
The ragged entrance that we gave;
Like snakes I heard their green coils spin
Up, up, around our floating grave;
But dauntless still, amid a din
Of clashing steel and battle shout,
We rushed to drive their boarders out.

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Around me in a closing ring
My grim-faced foemen darkly drew;
Then, sweeter than the lark in spring,
Loud rang our blades; the red sparks flew.
Twice, thrice, I felt the sudden sting
Of some keen stroke; then, swinging fair,
My own clave more than empty air.

The fight went raging past me when
My good blade cleared a silent place;
Then in a ring of fallen men
I paused to breathe a little space.
Elsewhere the deck roared like a glen
When mountain torrents meet; the fray
A moment then seemed far away.

The barren sea swept to the sky;
The empty sky dipped to the sea;
Such utter waste could scarcely lie
Beyond death's starved periphery.
Only one living thing went by:
Far overhead an ominous bird
Rode down the gale with wings unstirred.

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Windward I saw the billows swing
  Dark crests to beckon others on
To see our end; then, hurrying
  To reach us ere we should be gone,
They came, like tigers mad to fling
  Their jostling bodies on our ships,
  And snarl at us with foaming lips.

There was no time to spare: a wave
  E'en then broke growling at my feet;
One last look to the sky I gave,
  Then sprang my eager foes to meet.
Loud rang the fray above our grave—
  I felt the vessel downward reel
  As my last thrust met thrusting steel.

I heard a roaring in my ears;
  A green wall pressed against my eyes;
Down, down I passed; the vanished years
  I saw in mimicry arise.
Yet even then I felt no fears,
  And with my last expiring breath
  My past rose up and mocked at death.

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ON GILGO BEACH

On Gilgo Beach I stand,
And watch the sun climb up;
The carded foam rims all the strand
Along the sea's full cup.

Is it a wingèd flame
Or but a singing dart,
The swift, wee sandpiper that came
Out of the sun's white heart?

Out of the east came he,
Into the west has gone,
Far flashing down the surf, to be
The herald of the dawn.

In alternating psalms
The tumbling breakers sing;
Thrilled with their roar, I shun the calms
Our inland regions bring.

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Thrall to the sea of old,
  Shoreward I cannot gaze:
I know the marshes flaunt their gold,
  The dunes in sunlight blaze;

And inland hamlets lie
  With slender, tranquil spires;
And drifting down the peaceful sky
  The smoke of early fires.

The long-forgotten years
  Seize me with leopard-spring;
I feel the smart of vanished tears,
  And the lost kisses' sting.

I see return once more
  Sails that no mortal spread,
And hear along the sounding shore
  The requiem of the dead.

Deep in these beryl glooms
  They hold their hushed estate;
Lords are they all, whose glory blooms
  In tempests desolate.

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And one I loved, loved calm,
And with the fields to dwell:
Oh, now for him may there be balm
In ports delectable!

Lover of wood and lea,
Fate drove him far to roam,
Who should have kept, in place of me,
The narrow ways of home.

Brave heart, this flower I fling
Into your murmurous tomb:
Still round our hill the thrushes sing,
The crocuses still bloom.

But in this barren spot
I feel the sea's strange art:
Each billow calls, "Forget me not!"
The far rim draws my heart.

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THE RETURN

Now at last I am at home—
  Wind abeam and flooding tide,
And the offing white with foam,
  And an old friend by my side
  Glad the long, green waves to ride.

Strange how we 've been wandering
  Through the crowded towns for gain,
You and I who loved the sting
  Of the salt spray and the rain
  And the gale across the main!

What world honors could avail
  Loss of this—the slanted mast,
And the roaring round the rail,
  And the sheeted spray we cast
  Round us as we seaward passed?

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As the sad land sinks apace,
With it sinks each thought of care;
Think not now of aging face;
Question not the whitening hair:
Youth still beckons everywhere.

And the light we thought had fled
From the sky-line glows there now;
Bends the same blue overhead;
And the waves we used to plow
Part in beryl at the bow.

Hours like this we two have known
In the old days, when we sailed
Seaward ere the night had flown,
Or the morning star had paled
Like the shy eyes love has veiled.

Round our bow the ripples purled,
As the swift tide outward streamed
Through a hushed and ghostly world,
Where our harbor reaches seemed
Like a river that we dreamed.

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Then we saw the black hills sway
In the waters' crinkled glass,
And the village wan and gray,
And the startled cattle pass
Through the tangled meadow-grass.

Through the glooming we have run
Straight into the gates of day,
Seen the crimson-edgèd sun
Burn the sea's gray bound away—
Leap to universal sway.

Little cared we where we drove
So the wind was strong and keen.
Oh, what sun-crowned waves we clove!
What cool shadows lurked between
Those long combers pale and green!

Gray-beard pleasures are but toys;
Sorrow shatters them at last:
For this brief hour we are boys;
Trim the sheet and face the blast;
Sail into the happy past!

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BECALMED

THE yards are squared, the course is set,
And port and starboard decks are wet,
Yet not a flaw from day to day
Darkens the flood or sifts the spray.

Becalmed we lie, with rocking keel;
The helmsman nods above the wheel,
Or idly scans the shoreless sea,
Which sets no whispering murmurs free.

The still heights of the firmament
Spread round us like a silver tent,
And fervid days and silent seas
Wrap us in balmy dreams of ease.

No messenger with hurrying feet
Hails me with tidings of defeat,
Nor sad-faced herald hastes to tell
That with my love all is not well.

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I only know no seas can part
Us farther than a faithless heart,
And even Death we might deride
To part us more, though side by side.

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THE VOYAGER

Down stormy seas our straining bark
By whistling gales is onward blown;
The tackle shrills, the timbers groan,
The rack is wild and dark.

No land we sight, no bark we see,
The ice makes in the forward shrouds;
The blast that curls the scudding clouds
Is cold as cold can be.

Sometimes the moon is red as blood,
Sometimes the air is white with snow;
Yet care we not, but on we go
Across the hissing flood.

The swift flaws darken on the lee,
The salt sea-spray is flung behind,
The canvas bellies in the wind,
The north wind whistles free.

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And sometimes, on still Southern seas,
We feel the freshening of the gale,
That leaves behind our path a trail
Like swarming, silver bees.

The bell sounds in the quiet night;
Through driving clouds the full moon plows;
The shadow of our plunging bows
Doth split the wan moonlight.

Yet still we sail and sail and sail
Through many circles of the sun;
Sometimes into the dawn we run,
Sometimes through twilights pale:

And though the wild wet waste is round,
We cannot sail forevermore;
There is no sea without a shore,
Some port will yet be found.

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HOMEWARD BOUND

THERE is no sorrow anywhere,
Or care, or pain. The stinging hail
Beats on our faces like a flail,
Green water curls above the rail,
And all the storm's high trumpets blare,—
Whistles the wind, and roars the sea,
And canvas bellows to be free,
Spars whine, planks creak,—I only smile,
For home our keel creeps mile on mile.

I bend above the whirling wheel
With hands benumbed, but happy face.
Past us the wild sea-horses race,
Leap up to seize each twanging brace,
Or slip beneath our lifting keel.
Dreaming, I see the scudding clouds,
And ice make in the forward shrouds,
And all the long waves topped with foam,—
Yet heed them not: I 'm going home.

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Nightly our Northern stars draw nigh,
The Southern constellations sink.
Soon we shall see along the brink
Of these cold seas Fire Island blink
Its welcome in the frosty sky.
Beyond that light, beyond the glow
Of our great city spread below,
Thine eyes now wait to welcome me
Back where my heart has longed to be.

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THE SEA-KING

From out his castle on the sand
He led his tawny-bearded band
In stormy bark from land to land.

The red dawn was his goodly sign;
He set his face to sleet and brine,
And quaffed the blast like ruddy wine;

And often felt the swirling gale
Beat, like some giant thresher's flail,
Upon his battered coat of mail;

Or sacked at times some windy town,
And from the pastures, parched and brown,
He drove the scurrying cattle down;

And kissed the maids, and stole the bell
From off the church below the fell,
And drowned the priest within the well.

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And he had seen, on frosty nights,
Strange, whirling forms and elfin sights,
In twilight land, by Northern Lights;

Or, sailing on by windless shoal,
Had heard by night the song of troll
Within some cavern-haunted knoll.

Off Iceland, too, the sudden rush
Of waters falling, in a hush
He heard the ice-fields grind and crush.

His prow the languid South seas clove;
Warm, spicèd winds from lemon-grove
And heated thicket round him drove.

The storm-blast was his deity;
His lover was the fitful sea;
The wailing winds his melody.

By rocky scaur and beachy head
He followed where his fancy led,
And down the rainy waters fled;

And left the peopled towns behind,
And gave his days and nights to find
What lay beyond the western wind.

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THE RETURN OF THE CAPTAIN

FULL forty years as a master of ships, and at sea for a dozen more,
I have fitted my strength to the strength of the gale, I have furrowed the deep sea's floor;
I have plowed where I could not gather the gain, I have harrowed the fruitless deep,
Till I 'm sick for the smell of the fresh-turned earth and the joy of the men who reap;
I am sick of the Mother Carey's chicks, and the whine of the spars as they strain
In the heave of the sea through the watch below, and the deck in the sleet and the rain.
Oh, I want to go where the robins call, and the young frogs nightly sing,
And the swinging lines of the wild geese honk as they fly to the north in spring.
And I want to be where the wind is fair, however the wind may blow,

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And the work of a man stops short with the sun and each night is a watch below.
So I 'm going home to the swing of the scythe, and to follow the hissing plow,
And to watch the waves of the wind in the wheat and the clashing corn-blades bow.
Oh, many a night, in the middle watch, when the norther whistled shrill,
I have seen the corn, like men-at-arms, go marching over the hill—
Up the hill and over the hill I have heard their cymbals sound,
Till the roar of the bellowing sails was hushed and the sputtering scuppers drowned.
And I 've heard the horses munch in the stalls, and I 've scented the apple-trees,
While I drove through the shrieking hurricane or rolled on the oily seas.
In the roaring forties, and off the Horn, and under a blistering sky,
I have heard the feet of the shuffling cows, I have seen them marching by.
One by one I have seen them pass through the lanes where I longed to be,
Home in the valleys I used to know—home from the tedious sea.

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But here is the last of my outbound ports, and there is the beckoning blue,
And low in the rigging the trade-wind hums to the shanty of the crew.
The capstan-bars go round and round, with the click of the capstan-pawls,
Till the chain 's hove short at the singing prow and the loosened canvas falls.
With her anchor under her eager foot, and head-sails to port, pay off,
And carry on sail till the royals split and the scuppers splutter and cough,
And the forepeak jars with the thundering shock, as the green seas slip aboard,
And over the foaming, cluttered deck the seething flood is poured!
Ah! little it profits a mortal man that he squanders his life at sea;
Grows old on a bit of quarterdeck; a prisoner, thinks he is free!
A galley-slave to the calm and the storm, he shall call no hour his own;
A lover of men and the greening earth, he shall go to his death alone.
In the still green caves of the swinging sea he shall come at last to lie,

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Bereft of the fields of which he dreamed, bereft of the arching sky;
And around him there strange shapes shall swim, and into his dead eyes leer,
Who thought to lie on the strong, calm hill, with the thrushes singing near.
He shall give his youth, he shall give his strength, he shall give his days of peace;
He shall bind his brow with the whirling scud, from the storm find no release;
He shall learn of the wonders of the deep, and shall tell tales strange and wild:
But he sits as a guest on his own hearthstone and a stranger to his child.
He shall change, grow old, in a changeless world, for the sea recks not of time:
What it was, it is; what it is, will be; and it has no country or clime.
It abides, loves not, hates not, makes no pledge; oft conquered, conquers still:
For it sits on the throne of indifference, and it molds time to its will.
This is the law that it gives to men: "Obey, and obeying, die.
Ye shall tempt my strength, and fail at last; ye shall fail, not knowing why."

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I am tired of it all, and I 'm going home to the land
that gave me birth,
To dig and delve, and to water and plant, and rejoice
in the fruits of the earth;
To forget the wind-blown decks of ships, to forget the
desolate sky,
With only its pitiless, stalking clouds or a lone bird
winging by.
Then wait not, tarry not, but carry on sail, till the bowed
spars spring and crack,
And the canvas splits, and the leech-ropes part, and the
timbers groan and rack!
For I 'm going home, I am sailing home, from the clutch
of the hopeless sea;
The green hills lie at the end of the world, and the val-
leys call to me.

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THE CAPTAIN ASHORE

He came to his home from the tedious seas,
And abandoned his ship for a plow;
He was eager to smell the hay on the mow,
And to gather the fruit of his trees;

And eager to play at Apollos and Paul,—
To plant and water,—and feel the old joy
That he used to know when he was a boy:
He sailed again in the fall.

And all of the trouble was this: he found
That nothing was quite as it seemed
When he stood on his deck at night and dreamed
Of tilling the fruitful ground.

The hawk sailed high in the ambient blue,
And the pigeons cooed in the sun,
And over the drowsing fields was spun
A veil when the green came through.

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He heard the robins sing clear in the dawn,
And he drank in the breath of the spring,
But nothing in air or earth could bring
The touch of the days that were gone.

Hope, or the wondering mind of the boy,
Or the glamour of days to be—
Something had gone in his life at sea
To mock him in all his joy.

He rose in the night to study the sky,
And the wind in his face was a balm;
But it fretted his soul when the day was calm,
Or the white fog drifted by.

He missed the swing of the reeling stars
And the quick deck under him;
He missed the sea's unhampering rim:
The sheltering hills seemed bars.

He mounted the heights for a breath of the gale,
And its resonant voice in the trees
But echoed the roar of the following seas
And the bellowing of his sail.

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So long had he fought that he yearned for the strife
That he missed on the tame, safe land,
And he longed on the reeling deck to stand
And battle again for his life.

Had he grown so old that he needs must stay
Like a wrinkled crone by the fire?
All the years of his life, all the strength of desire,
Kept calling: "Away! away!

"The strength of the sea has strengthened thy hand,
The heart of the sea is thy heart;
Go back to thine own, to the end play thy part,
Unmoved by the thought of the land.

"Oh, fair are the fields of the glittering foam,
And dear is the voice of the gale;
Thy home is under the whitening sail;
Go back to thy home—thy home!

"The strength of the sea has strengthened thy hand,
The heart of the sea is thy heart:
It has bound thee in chains, it has set thee apart,
An alien to be to the land."

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THE OLD MAN

(TOLD BY THE STEWARD)

TURN out, you goggle-eyed lubber! Rouse out of your beauty-sleep!
For the pin-rail is mighty contiguous when a sailor-man plays at Bo-Peep.
Rouse out! Rouse out! Where are you? Where you 're likely to be for a time,
Unless you die with your boots on, and ship for a warmer clime.
For the old ship she 's a-rolling, and the land has fallen alee,
And a gale in the rigging is calling, "Farewell, O my love, to thee!"
The decks are sloppy and cheerless, and the hawse-pipes guzzle and cough,
And a neat little job on the royals is waiting for you up alof'.

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So clear your decks of their dunnage, and look to your steering-gear,
For the mate is a roaring lion, and probably headed here.
He 's a squint-eyed son of a sea-cook, with his fists uncommonly spry
In the dark of the moon, or in daylight, when the old man is n't nigh.
But the old man he 's a daisy, and as mild as a hen in the sun;
He 's Moses and Job and a turtle-dove all rolled into one.
But he 's game to the core, is the old man, and he does n't take aught on trust;
But he keeps the lead-line a-going, and the log is n't left to rust.
He 's never seen forward the mizzen, but he knows when a foot-rope is worn,
Or a bit of the rigging is chafed, or a cloth of a head-sail is torn.
He knows a man from a soger, till the soger knows it, too,
And he tries in his shame and pride to do what a man would do.
Just watch when he comes on deck: it 's always the same, day or night.

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First he looks to the shivering luff, then the binnacle
claims a sight;
Then he looks up to windward a moment, and slowly
his half-shut eye
Sweeps down to the leeward and back again, till the
sea and the sky
And the feel of the wind on his face have told every
secret they hold.
Now that 's the old man. Last year,—it was June,
I remember, and cold,—
We lay off the Horn in a calm, scuppers spouting at
every roll,
As we dipped to starboard or port, till each of us felt
in his soul
Fit for murder or sudden death, as a man will feel
when the spars
Whine, whine, and the canvas slats, and the sun or the
stars
Sasshay overhead in a dance that has neither begin-
ning nor end,
And a man would hail with joy whatever the gods
might send.
So we rolled in the drift off the cape, with that black
coast under our lee,
While the first mate waited and watched. It was dusk
when we saw loom at sea

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The grim white arch of the Horn sweeping down like
the wrath of God.
'T was the rack of the oncoming gale, and it leveled
the waters it trod,
And it twanged on a thousand harps, and roared like
a battle afar.
Just a moment I stood there and listened: heard a
furled sail flap loose on its spar,
And the water drip back from the chains as we rolled,
so deep was the hush;
Then a puff of wind hummed through the shrouds,
and the gale came down with a rush.
We heeled with the blow till I stood with my body
awash to the knee,
And I saw three forms whirl by in the ruck of a
breaking sea;
Then I heard the foretopsail boom, saw the slivered
canvas fly
Like the huge white wings of a bird down the waste
of the wild, black sky.
The old bark righted at last when the puff had ex-
pended its force,
And out of the wallowing hollows we brought her
again on her course;
But she sagged to the leeward a bit, and she balked
at each tumbling crest,

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And she nosed about like a blind old cow, though we steered our best.
Yet she yawed over half of the compass, for three of us stood at the wheel,
And we steered by the touch of the shoulder, and kept our course by the feel;
For our voices and sight were lost in the driving sleet and the din;
It was black as a nigger's pocket, and as cold as the heart of sin.
The first mate fretted and fumed till he saw the old man had appeared,
When he dropped his burden of care, and his face immediately cleared;
But the old man showed the master, as he stood there calm and grim,
For he knew that no one but God could lift the burden from him.
He looked at the straining canvas, and he looked at each bending spar,
And he peered through the murk to leeward for the loom of the threatening scaur;
And he kept the lead-line going, and he noted each lessening mark
Through the long, hard morning watch, till the dawn broke gray through the dark.

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Gray! the whole world was gray—the land and the sky and the ship,
And under the quarters, like wolves, we saw the gray seas slip.
Behind us the breakers broke, and under our leeward bow
We saw through the rocks of the coast the mile-long rollers plow.
Not a moment the old man lost, but he ordered the sheets all home,
And he cracked on sail, and he held her, till the decks were a smother of foam.
Our hearts stood still in our breasts, and our throats were dry with fear,
Though we saw we were clawing to windward and the rocks of the Horn dropped clear.
Well! we started our sheets again in the swirl of another gale,
And the sting of a thousand bees was the sting of the driving hail,
And the strength of a thousand seas was the strength that hurtled us on
Through a dusk too black for day, and for night too gray and wan.
Oh, the harp of the rigging sang, and the dour gale whistled shrill,

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As we dropped to the lonely valley and leaped to the watery hill;
Till the king of the graybacks caught us as we slipped in a watery swale,
And flooded the vessel fore and aft, and splittered the rail.
And it carried the old man outboard for a hundred feet or more,
Then lifted him up and dropped him at the break of my galley door.
He picked himself up right coolly, and he turned and shouted to me:
"Steward, you lazy loafer, must I come for my pot of cold tea?"

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THE SECOND MATE

I KNEW "Brute" Barnes as second mate
  Upon the old bark *Morning Star*,
A down-East hooker that of late,
  Holding the starboard tack too far,
  When all to pieces on a bar
Off Barnegat, lost crew and freight,

The latter of some value. I
  Made one trip in her, left the sea,
Content upon the land to die.
  I never knew a man more free
  With handspike and his fists than he.
Strike, then find out the reason why—

That was with him the jovial way.
  Hard and unfeeling when aboard,
On shore he gave his nature play.
  His mind with many a jest was stored,
  And from his unexhausted hoard
He kept his hearers blithe and gay.

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He was no bookman's pirate; one
  Would not have marked him in a crowd.
Slight, agile, and with eyes that fun
  Made gay until wrath made them proud,
  When something yellow seemed to cloud
The gray, that tears would overrun.

That is the way with fickle men,
  The kind girls like, as they liked him.
I knew his reputation when
  I shipped. Scarce was the shore-line dim
  Before he proved it by a whim
And felled a Dutchman we called Ben

Because he squinted. That same night—
  Wind fair, a steady eight-knot breeze,
Moon full, and not a cloud in sight—
  Some of our watch lay at their ease
  Up forward, gazing at the seas
Break leeward in a misty light,

And climb and fall against the sky.
  One man had fallen in a doze,
When Barnes came softly stepping by,
  And clapped pipe to the fellow's nose—
  He said to lighten his repose.
What did the fellow do then? Why,

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Just grin and bear it; that is all
A sailorman can ever do.
He bore the scar until his fall,
Months later, when, in reeving through
Its block a line, the ship broached to,
Barnes at the wheel. I saw him sprawl

A rod away through that sick air,
Then disappear. Barnes turned no look
To leeward, but began to swear,
While all our deck roared like a brook,
And our old hooker groaned and shook
As green seas swept her everywhere.

I think Barnes, having wronged the man,
Felt bitter toward him, thought him slow,
And in quick wrath flashed on that plan
To shake him up a bit; I know
He whitened when the man let go.
So all our log for that trip ran—

Blows, kicks, and curses. None went free.
And Barnes was ever quick to find
Work in the middle watch, or see
Fault where there was none. Once, half blind
With battling in a sleety wind,
We stayed below when called, till he

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Flashed down among us glowering there.
"Who is the last man up?" he cried;
And we, like whipped curs, blocked the stair,
Not to be last. Barnes stood aside,
But that same watch the last man died.
But one wild night we saw a flare

To leeward, and stood by till day;
When, level with the sea, we saw
A Dago brig awash with spray.
There while we watched her roll and yaw
Black on the sea raced flaw on flaw.
Then Barnes cried: "Clear a boat away!

Some one is in the rigging. Now,
Who goes with me?" Then out stepped four.
We launched the boat; we sent her prow
All whitening through that awful roar;
The poor lost creatures back we bore:
But nearing our own bark, saw how

A cold scud whitened round her till
She faded slowly on the sight.
We heard her rigging loudly shrill;
And saw the "old man," grim and white,
Stand beckoning, hastening on our flight.
They ran our boat up with a will;

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But as Barnes stepped across the rail,
A brace, by some poor fool set free,
Snapped round him like God's awful flail,
And swept him broken in the sea.
Then while we stood like dazed sheep, he
Rose, smiled, and roared a hearty hail:

"So long, boys!" and then turned away.
In that thick gale he feared no boat
Could live, and so he bade us stay
And try to keep the bark afloat.
Brute, yes, but something else, I vote,
As most men are. What would you say?

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RAINY TWILIGHT

Oh, put thy hand in mine, and we 'll take the road together:
With gold the west is dappled above the rainy hill;
Yet raindrops hiss upon the twigs in token of foul weather;
The twilight is deserted; these haunted ways are still.

But who with love and youth would hesitate to follow
This little cart-track running through sumacs to the sea?
Sweet is the veil the rain has made for love in every hollow;
The gay winds kiss to beauty thy happy face for me.

Each wheel-rut is a pool to glass the leafless thickets;
The dry reeds clash like cymbals, or sway like men at war;
Into the dusk a rabbit darts; in antiphons the crickets
Weave happy songs to shatter the silence they abhor.

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Wide, inaccessible, there lies the solemn level
Of darkened meadows stretching unto the ocean's rim,
Seamed with the winding waterways wherein shy creatures revel,
The meadow-hens brood near, the slow tide-waters brim.

The spray from off the sea blows salt across our faces;
Thy brow the cool rains kiss; thine eyes with love-light shine.
What bits of happy song we sing! What laughter haunts these places,
Thrilled with the far surf's thunder, damp with its sweeping brine!

The strong gales buffet us; the rain hosts fight with lances—
With leveled lances set, against us ride in vain:
Far and forgotten now is grief; no care with us advances;
Our gay gods haunt alike the sunshine and the rain.

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THE FLOWER OF LOVE

HAD she loved me, been true to me ever,
No task had then lacked the endeavor
I had made for her sake, and, crowned king,
Entered into her heart, found it sweet
To surrender all Fate gave to bring.
Just the lack of that touch meant defeat
Where men thought my victory complete.

Had she given my heart but one token,
One sign, of her love,—a word spoken,
Or the quick, deep heave of her breast,
Or a change in her brow's cool white,
Where lily turned rose,—I had pressed
To the fore in my last, doubtful fight,
Like a conqueror still, come what might.

Had she needed my care, it were given;
My strength, with the world I had striven,

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Given service and love—given all,
Fared with joy the hard road that she trod.
Once I gave, then I gave past recall.
Love springs like a flower from the sod;
That withered, the soul 's but a clod.

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THOU AND I

It was the heart of the wood:
Odors of hemlock and fir
Came to me where I stood;
The song of the shy chorister,
The wood-thrush, rang like a bell
Far in a thicket unseen;
At my feet one ray of light fell
From a break in the covert of green
Where laughed a patch of blue sky.
So still was it, one might have heard,
When the thrush has silenced his cry,
The wind on the throat of a bird
As it ruffled his feathers, or blew
From the sorrel one petal, or shook
From the star-grass its one drop of dew.
Soundless the slow, black brook
Under the great pines streamed;
Soundless the pines bent down.
Dear, it was then that I dreamed
But of you in the heart of the town.

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Heart of my heart, I would come
  Out of this world to thee.
The wood and the wild bee's hum
  Have hidden their beauty from me.
Gone is the bloom on the brier;
  Vanished the song of the thrush;
Only thy smile I desire,
  Only the flower of thy blush.
Here are the stones we crossed
  Over the slow, shallow stream;
Not a spike of the moss is lost,
  Not a glint in the black pool's gleam:
Yet now that I walk here alone,
  I see but a wood-choked shore,
Dull stream with its bridge of stone
  In a marish waste—no more.
But far in the garish town
  Blooms Love's shy garden spot:
There the heart's-ease lifts its crown;
  There springs the forget-me-not.

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THE LOST KINGDOM

My kingdom lay upon a hill
  Wide open to the Northern sea,
  And thither came right merrily
The joyous ones who miss me still.

I claimed the shade of four great trees,
  A stretch of moss, a bit of clover,
  A blue patch where the sky arched over,
And all the outlook of the seas.

And thither from the dusty town
  I daily passed, and blotted out
  The sordid world. A merry rout
Went through my kingdom, up and down.

There butterflies on asters rode,
  And spiders spun about the place,
  And squirrels, scolding to my face,
Claimed all my realm as their abode.

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Ah me! What splendor shut me in—
  Scent of the rose, and brier-blooms
  From out the trackless thicket glooms,
And in the air a doubtful din

Of whistle, pipe, and caroling,
  And one low, lulling monotone,
  Half chant or pæan, and half moan,
Where salt sea waves came wandering!

The queen? I know not where she strayed;
  I only know that she was fair,
  With hints of sunlight in her hair,
And eyes half mocking, half afraid.

And many a time I saw the sheen
  Of her bright gown go flashing by
  Some woodland glade that opened nigh;
And then the thicket grew a screen.

But wheresoe'er she passed, the day
  Grew still and white, and each dark path
  Shone in a twilight aftermath,
As if God smiled upon the way.

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Too rare her visits grew, and I
  Made rarer journeys to my own;
  For now my kingdom seemed alone
Where her uncertain steps drew nigh.

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THE HEART OF TRUTH

DEAR, my love I do not hold
  Just a thing to barter for:
Say I love you if you love;
  Scorn you if you should abhor.

Rather, I would give you all—
  All, though asking naught in fee,
Like the grape unto its wine,
  Like the raindrop to the sea.

Love for me high service is,
  Just to make your life complete:
Do you need a knight? I go.
  Victim? I fall at your feet.

Naught is trifling that you ask;
  Naught so great I would not strive.
Would my dying serve you, dear,
  It were shame to be alive.

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This is all that I could wish:
  Say, "This day she spoke a word
Kindly to me as I passed";
  Or, "She looked up when I stirred."

But I ask not that. I ask
  Only that my love may run
On and on unchecked by you,
  Like a shadow 'neath the sun.

Is it folly? I 'm content
  Once for all, dear, to be true,
Though my doubtful card-world spins,
  I the needle, pole-star you.

Why should you, then, grieve if I,
  Tired of feigning, drop my mask
Just this once? Is truth less truth
  If unspoken, may I ask?

Had I kept to silence, I
  Should have known your step the same,
Listened for it on the stair,
  Trembled when I heard your name.

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All your little tricks of speech,
  Ways of moving—all I knew;
I first saw you in the spring,
  So spring seemed a part of you.

Day for me began when I
  Saw your face across the room;
If you then but turned and smiled,
  Even winter seemed to bloom.

Wall on wall divided us.
  What if I unlocked the door,
For an instant showed my face
  To your startled eyes—no more?

God has set you high, in truth.
  Can my love make you less high?
Does the glassing, small pool vex
  The blue radiance of the sky?

Nothing now is changed. My days
  In the old way come and go,
Warped by neither joy nor grief.
  Naught is changed, dear—but you know.

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"DEAR HEART, WHERE HAST THOU WANDERED?"

DEAR heart, where hast thou wandered?
What happier regions stay
Thy lingering feet, whose coming changed
My winter into May?

Now all our slopes are burgeoned
In summer's lavish mood,
And deep within the grove the thrush
Has belled the solitude.

The laurels set the hillside
With many a spectral light;
Seen through the dusk, they stand like nymphs,
Expectantly in flight.

But somewhere thou dost linger,
Implacable, afar,
Though high within the twilight sky
Gleams cold our trysting-star.

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The brooks we loved still murmur,
  Though now through dells of gloom;
The very hills have lost with thee
  Their moiety of bloom.

Still, each leaf whispers of thee;
  In every path once trod
By thy dear feet, thy spirit yet
  Speaks from remembering sod.

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CONCERNING ONE

Had she any dower
When she came?
Yes; her face was like a flower,
And her soul was free from blame.
On her cheeks a rose-leaf flame
Ever fluttered. When she spoke,
Then for me the morning broke.

Wore she any crown
When she died?
All the earth seemed sodden brown,
Though 't was June; and children cried,
And placed flowers at her side;
And the paths that once she trod
Seemed the highways unto God.

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HIS QUEST

WHAT seek'st thou at this madman's pace?
"I seek my love's new dwelling-place;
Her house is dark, her doors are wide,
There bat and owl and beetle bide,
And there, breast-high, the rank weeds grow,
And drowsy poppies nod and blow.
So mount I swift to ride me through
The world to find my love anew.
I have no token of the way;
I haste by night, I press by day.
Through busy cities I am borne,
On lonely heights I watch the morn
Whiten the east, and see the light
Of waning moon gleam thwart my flight.
Sometimes a light before me flees;
I follow it, till stormy seas
Break wide before, then all is dark.
Sometimes on plains, wide, still, and stark,

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I hear a voice; I seek the sound,
And ride into a hush profound.
To find her dwelling I will ride
Worlds through and through, whate'er betide."

To find her dwelling rode he forth,
In vain rode south, in vain rode north;
In vain in mountain, plain, and mart
He searched, but never searched his heart.

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APRIL

Oh, strangely fall the April days!
The brown buds redden in their light,
And spiders spin by day and night;
The willow lifts a yellow haze
Of springing leaves to meet the sun,
While down their white-stone courses run
The swift, glad brooks, and sunshine weaves
A cloth of green for cowslip leaves
Through all the fields of April days.

Oh, sweetly fall the April days!
My love was made of frost and light,
Of light to warm and frost to blight
The sweet, strange April of her ways.
Eyes like a dream of changing skies,
And every frown and blush I prize.
With cloud and flush the spring comes in,
With frown and blush maids' loves begin;
For love is like rare April days.

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SONG

I

THERE 's a garden by a river,
Where the grasses bend and quiver
On the river's reedy edges.
Roses crimson all the hedges,
And a leafy lane runs down
Through the meadows to a town,
  In a winding way.
But where lies that garden blowing,
Where that river, stilly flowing,
And the lawn through meadows going,
  I shall never say.

II

Something fairer than a rose
In that unknown garden grows.
Something sweeter than the rhyme
Sung by birds in lilac-time;

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Fairer than a dream of youth,
Thought all lost to care and ruth.
  Something with a heart like May;
Rose and lily all in one;
Golden hair caught from the sun;
Eyes with laughter overrun.
  What? I 'll never say.

III

Dreamy face and rosebud mouth,
Breath like spring winds from the south,
Eyes disclosing more than lies
Hedged beneath the bended skies
  Of a day in May.
So, when days grow longer, sweeter,
Grow the rare June hours completer;
And the winter's time for snowing
Leaves the June winds chance for blowing,
I will seek this garden, growing
  Where I 'll never say.

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SLEEP

In a tangled, scented hollow,
On a bed of crimson roses,
Stilly now the wind reposes;
Hardly can the breezes borrow
Breath to stir the night-swept river.
Motionless the water-sedges,
And within the dusky hedges
Sounds no leaf's impatient shiver.
Sleep has come, that rare rest-giver.

Light and song have flown away
With the sun and twilight swallow;
Scarcely will the unknown morrow
Bring again so sweet a day.
Song was born of Joy and Thought;
Light, of Love and her Caress.
Nothing 's left me but a tress;
Death and Sleep the rest have wrought—
Death and Sleep, who came unsought.

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"LOVE ONCE MADE HIS HOME WITH ME"

Love once made his home with me,
  Broke my bread, and drank my wine,
On the coasts of Arcady.

How we praised the purple sea,
  Cool shade, and the strong sunshine!
Love once made his home with me.

Joy we thought to hold in fee,
  Slave at Love's eternal shrine,
On the coasts of Arcady.

Death alone, we said, could free
  Hearts that Love's dear chains entwine.
Love once made his home with me.

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Leveled let my dwelling be;
  Love has gone and left no sign
On the coasts of Arcady.

All my future lost with thee,
  This I keep: the past is mine.
Love once made his home with me
On the coasts of Arcady.

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AN IDEALIST

Once more he roams the hills he used to know,
And threads the woodland paths wherein he strayed.
Above the trees familiar skies bend low,
And laurel thickets still shut in the glade,
And make a secret shade
The vireos love to voice their sorrow in.
The blue jays jeer him as they see him pass,
Warning the woodland of him; in the grass
The hidden crickets make a doubtful din;
And shy things range where once their fellows ranged—
All now is as it used to be, but he is changed.

How changed is he from him who gaily took
These windy uplands with his open joy
In all the pageant of the year, and shook
The world's greed from him like an empty toy
That rang to base alloy!

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For him the pine-trees echoed his content;
The thrushes voiced his own heart's ecstasy,
Thrice glad with him because they too were free.
Beauty to him was life's one argument;
He strove to fit his nature to that law,
Glad for the perfect rose, the day without a flaw.

Oh, many a dawn once found him on some height
That overlooked the hushed and darkened plain,
To catch the first coming of the light,
With all the pomp of morning in its train!
He faced the sheeted rain
On many a sodden road; he dared the sea,
Wind-swept and raucous, with his slanting sail,
Knowing the light that led him would not fail:
For, lo! the embattling seas curved royally,
Loud rolled the diapason of the wave;
Each raindrop, stored with light, a mimic small
world gave.

He knew the haunt of every beast and bird;
The secrets of the seasons were his own:
Where hid the first wild flowers, and when stirred
The sap in spring, and when in antiphon
The katydids intone

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Their vibrant chant for all the garnered years.
Nature he knew, but life he did not know;
Gaily he fared, untouched by love or woe.
He loved the singer's art, but not the seer's,
And sought through many a realm unknown to kings
The bloom that vaguely lies on far, desirèd things.

He dreamed of things that vanished long ago:
Old heroes dead on many a dented shield;
The wine-dark sea, the *Argo* sailing slow
Past the dim Thracian coast, the dragon-field.
He rode where brave knights reeled,
In tournaments, before the leveled lance;
He sailed with early mariners, and saw
Strange seas stretch wide before, and felt their awe.
Dreaming, he walked the fields of old Romance,
And all the past, of which he seemed a part,
Quickened with life again, and bloomed within his heart.

It blooms no more. To-day now walks with him,
And little children's love, and old men's prayers,
And hopes grown hopeless,—but with courage grim,—
And griefs that steal upon him unawares.
His thoughts are falling stairs

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That leave his heaven of noble tasks unwon;
So, nigh to earth, he sets small clod on clod,
And builds not high, yet reaches up to God.
What he has done, spurs him; what left undone,
He holds, in his own fashion, just the goal
God sets to try the courage on, to test the soul.

He seeks it still, though he will never win
Unto the place where God has set the mark.
Yet dauntless still, like those who just begin
On holy quests, he struggles in the dark
Through regions lone and stark.
Humbled, he still is high; baffled, does not despair;
The light that led him thus far leads him still:
Beauty still clothes the sea, and crowns the hill,
And molds men's deeds to something rich and rare.
He looks beyond cold circumstance's bars,
Lord of his chastened soul and brother to the stars.

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A SONG FOR THE HOPELESS

HAS thy heart one vain wish? Then repress it, and keep
The hard road of thy duty, as the arrow its flight.
As the bird wings its trackless, lone way through the night,
For a nest in the reeds where the slow waters creep
From the uplands down to some warm river's mouth,
So keep thou thy course till thou reachest thy South.

Thy South or thy North—little matters the end;
The crown 's in the doing. If I risk mine own soul
That sooner or later I reach a low goal,
It is only my soul's low worth that I spend;
But the struggle, the steadfastness—there lies my gain;
Gives my soul in the end strength meet to its pain.

Grow strong by repression, not use. See the sun,
How it scorches the plains, and the rivers makes dry;
So the grieved heart is seared by its passion; a sigh
Only mars, warps the soul, and the mischief is done.
When a man stands alone, with his heart under heel,
He 's a man, knows at last how the strong gods feel.

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Then rejoice in thy courage to worst thy desire,
Break free from the fetters that shackle thy heart!
He who feels the keen pain, and yet laughs at the smart,
Who burns in the flame, while disdaining the fire,
He is victor, not victim; has fathomed God's use
Of the soul of a man, not Fortune's abuse.

For what is thy life but a struggle to stand,
Like a man, firm, erect, with a smile on thy face?
The lily may spring from a noisome place,
And the wild rose blow on a barren strand.
Be it rose, then, or soul, oh, abide the last hour!
God waits through the growing to judge of the flower.

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MY CAPTAIN

YESTERDAY, with shout of glee,
My boy sailed away to sea.
His stout ship was but a chair;
Sea (the grass) was everywhere;
And his sails two apple-trees
Loudly roaring in the breeze;
Tide at flood, and wind offshore,
Sailed, to sail forevermore.
With his bright hair blown about,
He had only time to shout
Some brief parting, wave his hand,
Then set sail for fairy-land.
I have been so far astray
I have quite forgot the way;
But for him it lies before
The known portals of my door,
Far this side of candle-light,
And the dragons of the night,

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And this strange new world's alarms,
Near the shelter of my arms.
In the boughs of blowing trees
He sees strange, far mysteries;
Lofty cloud and shadow are
Magic isle or fairy-car;
And the white road from my gate
Runs, he knows, where lions wait,
Hiding in the tangled grass
For his fearful feet to pass.
So five yards from him I stay
Half a million miles away,
Happy still, but thinking, though,
Deeper thoughts than he can know—
Thinking he will sail again,
Some day, for the world of men,
With the same glad, careless grace
Shining on his eager face,—
Coming not, despite of harms,
To the lost port of my arms.

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MARCH

THERE is no sun, and yet no threat of rain;
No radiance, yet all the dark boles shine;
No wind, though all the air is like a wine
As I go up the road in my love's train.
Between her love-looks and her laugh I gain
Glimpses of barren fields, scents of the pine,
And sounds like bells of silver far and fine—
It is the bluebird singing in the lane.
Breathless we pause. Again the ringing chime,
Now farther, finer, fills the silences.
Gone are the bare woods and the hints of rime
Along the north hedge-rows: we dream of ease
In sunny orchards coming into bloom,
And walk a moment in their radiant gloom.

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"WHEN THE LAST HOUR SHALL COME"

When the last hour shall come, and I go,
May the spring be at full, life at flood—
And a laugh on the lips, and a glow
On the cheek from the heart's ruddy blood!

No pausing for me then to weigh
The merits of deeds, count the cost
Of each act; pleading, say:
"Here I won, there in weakness I lost.

"But the strength, O my Judge, that was mine;
There I stood at my full height of soul:
What was weak was the dregs of the wine,
Just the sediment left in the bowl."

Bah! I knew the full price of each sin;
Knew how hard was the road that I trod:
Shall I prove myself weak, just to win?
A hypocrite, quibble with God?

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What were heaven to me, may I ask,
If I cringe at the gate for my gain?
Then were heaven but a place for a mask,
Where the mummers make merry in vain.

What I am, tried to be, He must know;
Where I failed, no last hour can requite.
In the pride of my strength may I go,
Like a man, with my face to the fight!

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THE ROAD WE CAME

READ AT THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CLASS OF 1877, YALE UNIVERSITY

I

ONCE more the urban groves have called us home.
The cool shade and the academic walls
Echo the tread that now no longer falls
Blithe as in days when we were wont to roam
Beneath the elms' green dome.
Little there is that we can now call ours,
Whose world is but a shadow on the grass,
Where we as aliens walk by alien towers,
And, strangers, watch the strange young faces pass.
The garrulous Present brings but memories here;
The Future veils her face; only the Past is clear.

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II

The Past is clear. Across our brooding eyes
Bright fares the goodly company we knew
Before the laurel or the saddening rue
Had crowned each dark defeat or high emprise.
In dreams our old world lies
Wide, unhorizoned to the eager gaze
That longed to build a bridge unto some star
That shone upon the future's unvexed ways.
No star was there whose distance was a bar
To that high spirit of the growing man
Who, seeing, longed to gain, and longing, cried, "I can."

III

We held in truth the happy heritage
Of plainer living; saw the new Yale rise,
And statelier groups of elms fret the blue skies.
We were the demos of that simpler age
And read life's golden page
Together where the two streets met the town.
From that lost coign grew our unwritten law
That simple manhood is man's highest crown.
There honor, rooted in endeavor, saw
No pent-up truth warring with things untrue:
The strong hand won by strength; the weak received
its due.

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IV

How fast the deeds of old now reappear!
Again we strive upon the eager field,
And know the old heart-sickness when we yield,
The wild, uplifting, glad joy when we hear
The victory's crowning cheer.
Once more the parched throat and the heaving breast,
The maddening, gladdening struggle for the goal,
The mental sinking that comes with our rest,
After the bloom is gone, assail the soul.
Oh, short the road into the purple past
Where we were crowned with youth! Would that our
youth might last!

V

We hear the boatmen on the still, black stream
As we row home at dusk, and hear them call
From deck to shore, and then the clanking fall
Of their home-coming anchors; hear the scream
Of night-hawks, catch the gleam
Of phosphorescence as we slowly row
Past river-banks the dusk makes strangely fair.
High o'er the city shines the twilight glow,
And on the harbor trails its golden hair.
The river flows here yet; still broods the shore;
But others track them now, where we shall go no more.

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VI

Deep in the cloistered refuge of the mind
Some kept the scholar's vigil. Never star
Blazed in its orbit but was seen afar
By some lone watcher strenuous to bind
Its uses to mankind;
No new truth flashed upon the waiting world
But some strong thinker in sad loneliness
Fired the slow train with which the bolt was hurled.
Still to their goal our own rare scholars press,
And high upon the watch-towers of the soul
Guard the eternal truths and keep their sacred scroll.

VII

But some there were who dwelt in Arcady,
And took in secret the unplauded ways,
Shunning the contests and the fevered days,
Glad only with the spirit to be free.
For them the windy lea,
The cool woods, and the twilights hushed and brown,
The lifted steeps that held the last of day,
The far lights glimmering in the college town,
Beckoning them home along the darkened way!
How leaped the frosty road to meet their feet!
What talks and silences made all their journeys sweet!

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VIII

For them fair Greece and sunlit Italy
Rose bright above our dark New England soil.
They saw great consuls leading home their spoil,
And spoke Odysseus on the wine-dark sea.
They saw the mænads flee,
The fauns pursue athwart the beechen lawn,
And old Silenus lolling in the shade,
Trying some oaten note; and here at dawn
The wide-eyed Daphne came all unafraid—
Came all alone, and crooning some weird air,
Knelt at the shaded pool and combed her dusky hair.

IX

Their walks are little changed: Fair Haven yet
Over its river leans; to Derby still
The road winds up by many a wooded hill;
Eastward slow creeks the wide salt-marshes fret;
And fogs hang gray and wet
In winter over Branford and its shore.
And often have they tacked in flaw and calm
Beyond the Thimbles, heard the raucous pour
Of tumbling, sunlit seas, and felt the balm
Of windless twilights melting into flame.
The salt seas lure them still; the wet ways are the same.

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X

We have been fortunate: so many years,
  So many lives, yet few have failed the call.
  But some heard not, and in their place the fall
Of Sorrow's footstep breaks upon our ears,
Starting unbidden tears.
  Dear lost ones, who with us were wont to roam
Under the elms when life was in its spring,
  We send this word: Our hearts are still your home;
Your voices sound beside us when we sing;
  Still where we planted it the ivy blooms;
  With leaves of memory we deck your far-off tombs.

XI

Green in the white, still heat of later June
  The college sits in all her gracious pride,
  And lovingly her portal opens wide
To us, her sons, who here, to age immune,
In gladness scorn to prune
The wings they mimic now, but in youth wore.
  Back run the lustra five; we see again
The boyish faces that we knew of yore,
  But darkly mirrored now in bearded men.
Now we troop home where burns the candle-light
The mother sets for us. We keep the tryst to-night.

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XII

We keep the tryst, not questioners of each heart,
But rather as known ships that pass at sea,
And speak in passing, and hail cheerily,
Before the gale shall bear them far apart.
"What cargoes for what mart
Beareth your laboring craft across the blue?
Is all now well with you? Report us well."
Thus runs the seaman's hail; so runs ours, too.
Then looking sadly back across the swell,
We watch each other's canvas slowly run
To ports where we would be or to oblivion.

XIII

And yet there are such toilsome heights to scale,
Such pleasant valleys where the soul may win
Fair courts of ease to make its dwelling in,
That it is easier praising than to rail
When wrongs win, virtues fail;
And it is easier being false than true
When Honor bids us wage a losing war—
For life is oft the choice between the two,
And we, for ease, love what we should abhor.
Yet what avails our wealth or power or fame
If Virtue flaunts in rags and Honor cries her shame?

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XIV

Here in life's noon we put our toiling by
To rest a little in the grateful shade.
From battles past and struggles unessayed,
A moment here we turn in ease to lie.
To-morrow we shall try
Our strength anew upon the stricken field,
And put forth all our power, and haply gain,
Or pass in silence on our lifted shield.
One thing we know: No victory can stain
The fallen hero whom to earth it flings,
Or lift the conquering knave on strong, upbearing wings.

XV

From its lone heights the soul looks calmly down
Upon the mortal in its narrow groove.
Backward and forward swift the shuttles move,
Weaving the web of life. Whether men frown
Upon the work or crown
With wingèd praise, it shall in naught avail
Except the soul glows in the web we spin.
If absent, then, though victors, we shall fail;
If there, though vanquished, we shall surely win.
We weave the fabric, and receive our due:
Only the weaver knows if it be false or true.

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XVI

Only the weaver knows what pain and care
  Have sped the flying shuttle in its course;
  What tangled threads have neutralized his force,
What poverty has kept his pattern bare.
Yet it shall still be fair,
  If he but follow beauty till he die.
  Serene in faith, he keeps his low estate;
Vanquished, he puts the ended combat by,
  And conquers conquest while he learns to wait.
For him the stars shall bend, the high gods toil,
Who shall betray no trust, no high pursuit assoil.

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NEAR SUNSET

SOMETIMES, from fields grown sadly strange
Since robins fled, by woodland path,
Straight up the valley-head I range
To reap the day's poor aftermath.

The spiders spin across my face;
The startled partridge, fleeing, makes
A sudden silence in the place
The rasping cricket scarcely breaks.

I climb the hill: the top draws nigh;
The path grows light again, and lo!
The pale new moon, the crimson sky,
The village on the plain below!

And weary huskers, binding long
On dusky slopes, still bind by night,
While, like the murmur of a song,
Their talk is blown across the height.

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INDIAN SUMMER

WHAT heights of rest are in these silences!
What thirst of plains the sunlight seems to slake!
The meadows bask; no bitter north winds wake
The tree-tops from their fruitless dream of ease.
The slow brooks murmur like a swarm of bees,
And some shy creature in the tangled brake
Darts and is still, and trooping sparrows make
A moment's chatter in the cedar-trees,
And then on far skies quickly seem to cease,
Or, wheeling, drop behind some stubbled mound;
But all day long the brooks find no release,
And lift their wandering undertones of sound.
This is the year's full flower, the crown of peace,
The sunlight's harvest, and the south wind's bound.

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IN NOVEMBER

Oh, mark how through the latticework of brown—
  November's trees—the lights of gray skies sift!
  No birds now sing, nor any shadows shift
Below the sunless gables of the town;
But brooks run tawny, and a purple crown
  Of elder-tops the marish hollows lift,
  While haunting twitters from the thickets drift,
And hollow pipes the gale across the down.
Now memories like voices fill the gale—
  The joy of harvests and the hope of springs,
And songs, though felt, unsung, and griefs that pale,
  And loves that flush, and hopes that lift on wings,
And sunlight on the silent, winter hills,
Thrilling anew the heart that sorrow thrills.

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A WINTER MORNING

THE snow-drifts pile the window-ledge,
The frost is keen, the air is still,
The lane that lies below the hill
Is drifted even with the hedge.
Gray skies, and dark trees shaken bare,
Blue smoke that rises straight in air,—
While down the west a yellow glare
Is driven like a wedge.

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IN SHADOW

FROM the town where I was bred
I have been so long away,
In its streets I met to-day
Both the living and the dead.

Though the upland paths we trod,
Long ago, are overgrown,
When to-day I walked alone
Your step sounded on the sod.

Long I climbed the eastern hill
Till the woods lay at my feet;
In my heart your own heart beat,
On my hand your touch lay still.

Nothing there had changed, and there,
Through that hushed and shadowed place,
I passed, meeting face to face
My old fancies everywhere.

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In still valleys I walked through,
My heart's throbbing deafened me:
Suddenly I seemed to see
Jealous Death's dim shape of you.

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MARSYAS

ROUND one piping on the mountain
  Timid forest creatures drew;
Song of bird and purl of fountain
  Woke anew
  In the oaten pipe wherein he blew.

Ivy sprung, and myrtle nodded,
  Grasses rippled, sedges grew;
Silver-winged and tawny-bodied
  Wild bees flew
  Thickets over, meadows through and
    through.

With the swift sweep of the swallow,
  Springtime seemed to catch the earth,
Sunlight flooded steep and hollow
  With new birth,
  Woke the hillside to the river's mirth.

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Quiet things he loved the best:
Songs of springs that bubble up
Through wet grasses, weight-oppressed;
Bees that sup,
Droning in the almond-blossom's cup;

Beat of wings that swiftly pass;
Sounds of locust-horns that made
Subtle music in the grass.
These he played,
While shy things came to him, unafraid.

Ceased he. Silent grew the fountain;
Fled each creature to its lair;
Solemn wood and silent mountain,
Soundless air,
Woke to find the winter everywhere.

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THE DREAMER

Oh, I have sailed
Where others failed,
Found polar seas and Happy Isles,
And gone a million million miles
Through summer and through snowing!
And I have seen
Old Pan between
The oaken vistas, as I passed
Low banks Lycæus overcast,
His oaten pipe a-blowing.

Sometimes on seas
Sweet melodies
Of phantom voices fill the sky,
And fairy barges pass me by,
Bound out for El Dorado.
Through frozen noons
And torrid moons,
Toward stranger noons and moons, I steer;
Through wood and waste I journey near
The Valley of the Shadow.

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In crowded throngs
I hear strange songs,
And blare of trumpets sounding by
Old villages and castles high
And pied and daisied hollows;
Or see, between
The spring's young green,
The gleaming shoulder, pearly white,
Of laughing dryad, in swift flight,
The gay faun hotly follows.

Sometimes the night
Is filled with light,
And all the sweet myrrh-thickets glow
With softened yellow, when below
A thousand lanterns quiver.
Through outer glooms
And trailing blooms,
I sweep into enchanted lands,
Fast skimming o'er the golden sands
Of Bagdad's storied river.

And dancing girls
In dreamy whirls,
By palace doors that brightly gleam,
Float through like visions in a dream,

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The sweet thought follows after.
And eyes meet eyes
In love's surprise,
Hearts beat, and loud the wailing flute
And murmur of the drowsy lute
Do mimic happy laughter.

The grace that gleams
In poets' dreams
And lovers' thoughts I still pursue;
For me the sunlight paints the dew
And lilies perfume-laden.
To me bird-song
And joy belong,
And poles come near, and stars draw nigh;
For me doth droop the laughing eye
Of arch and tender maiden.

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ONCE WITH DAPHNE

I WITH Daphne used to meet
Where the rushes belled our feet
On still mornings. Straightway then
We forsook the haunts of men
For the cool and secret glooms
Where the unsunned laurel blooms.
Round her waist she deftly drew
Her bright fawn-skin, and laughed through
That black tangle of her hair,
That unwinding but left bare
Half her shoulder's gleaming grace.
Then she turned her perfect face,
And with murmured laughter shook
Down cool dew-baths. Straight we took
Flight again, and hastened on
To a valley dusk and wan,
And so strange we heard anew
Our old footsteps running through,

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And so dim that each one's face
Seemed a shadow in the place,
And so still the wind was heard
Blowing on the beak of bird,
And the woodland noises seemed
Something soundless that we dreamed.
There her voice was like a flame
When, betimes, she spoke my name,
And that whispered speech of hers
Drowned the woodland choristers;
Drowned th' elusive murmuring
Of the bubbling, hidden spring;
Drowned the ghosts of winds a-search
For the vibrant leaf of birch.
Ah, how little wise men know
Where we happy dreamers go!

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THE FLIGHT

ALONG the lonely mountain
And down the dusky vale,
He took by scaur and tangle
A path without a trail.

No bird sang on that journey,
And, piping through the glade,
No brown young shepherd hurried
From sun to happier shade.

There was no wind; the tree-tops
Seemed frozen on the sky:
There was no sound; the wild-woods
Gave forth no wild thing's cry.

He saw no foe before him,
He saw none in the rear,
Yet ever seemed to hurtle
The wild, avenging spear.

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The sunlight made his shadow
  One crouching at his knees;
The darkness hid the leering face
  Of hate among the trees.

He thought he heard low whispers,
  And stealthy foemen glide,
As all his dark pursuers
  Closed round on every side.

Yet never hand was lifted
  Against him in that place,
And never grim avenger
  With him stood face to face.

He was his own sad victim;
  His was the slayer's part:
For ever sped the arrow—
  The sin within his heart.

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THE STRAYED REVELER

As she flees up the mountain-side
The valley is astir
With gay companions, racing wide
In vain pursuit of her.

In every tangled copse they seem
To see her streaming hair,
And where the wild, white lilies gleam,
Her face a lily there.

But laughing, hand to side to still
The beating of her heart,
Tiptoe upon the lonely hill
She stands, with lips apart.

The gay rout passes, and there falls
A silence in the place;
Again the cuckoo softly calls,
The watchful squirrels race.

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Then, like a sigh among the trees,
A wind is softly heard,
And, like a leaf blown down the breeze,
There darts a songless bird.

For one swift moment then she slips
Into a world apart:
She thinks of mold upon her lips
And dust about her heart.

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IN MASQUERADE

Now every twig 's a gleaming lance
With jeweled haft of dazzling frost,
And withered tops of weeds, once tossed,
Are frozen in a spectral trance.

The moon is blown a silver boat
Across the soundless upper seas;
A beetling castle stand the trees,
The valley is a bridgeless moat.

Beyond the meadow winding down
The dusky hollow to the sea,
Beyond the unstirred poplar-tree,
I seek two lights within the town.

They glitter like a serpent's eyes,
And waiting in their luring glow,
The serpent-soul I seek, I know,
Sits there in woman's sweetest guise.

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SIR LAUNCELOT

NEAR Camelot the rivers meet
The lane where once he rode with her:
He rides, and sees a dead wind stir
The pallid waters at his feet.

He hears the windless thickets stirred
By some wild creature. O'er the grass
He sees the hawk's gray shadow pass,
Yet knows it not from leaf or bird.

Now he has come where fancies reign:
Now though he flees, he soon returns;
Like flame his heart within him burns;
His mind is like a turning vane.

In crypts he vainly tries to pray—
There troop the burdens of gay songs;
In crowded inns he jests of wrongs,
But feels his great heart giving way.

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His soul is like a hunted thing
'Twixt hell and heaven. Each kiss that drew
Their lips together thrills anew,
And then becomes a serpent's sting.

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A POET

THREE things he knew: the shock that sorrow brings,
The woodland's secrets, and one woman's heart.
These made the gamut of his flame-wrought art,—
Grief, truth, and love: from these the poet springs.

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THE FLIGHT TO THE HILLS

Lo! as I came to the crest of the hill, the sun on the heights had arisen,
The dew on the grass was shining, and white was the mist in the vale;
Like a lark on the wing in the dawn I sang, like a guiltless one freed from his prison,
As backward I gazed through the valley, and saw no one on my trail.

For at night one had come to my couch in the first dreamless hours of my slumber,
Put hand to my forehead, and whispered: "Up, David! and make no delay;
For against thee the king in his wrath has set murderers and spies without number,
So haste to escape from their clutches ere the hirelings shall block every way."

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So I rose and went hastily forth: with one bound passed
the door where the watchman lay sleeping,
Slipped fast by the moonlighted wall till we came to
the last city gate;
One blow, and the gateman lay prone; one creak, and
forth I went creeping;
"With God!" cried my friend as he vanished, and
left me alone to my fate.

So I took the straight road for the cherishing hills, with
each step my heart growing lighter;
For like an old song just recalled was the scent of
the grasses I trod;
And far in the vale to his mate in the wood the bulbul
sang songs to delight her;
And sweet was the chime of the brook as it swirled
through the rock-studded sod.

At times I would pass by a fold in the dark and hear
the shy sheep's muffled bleating,
Or hear the lone bark of a fox, or the scurry of feet
from my path;
For this was the time of the hunter and hunted, the
place of their meeting;
And I laughed as I thought of my flight from the
town and of Saul and his wrath.

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How my heart leaped up to the game as I ran, for I
was the north wind's brother,
As keen as the hare to scent foe, as swift as the fox
to flee;
So as I thought of Saul's men on my track, and stum-
bling against one another,
Wearied and worn with the chase, I shouted aloud
in my glee.

Still dark was the east as I left the plain and sprang
from boulder to boulder,
Up to the hills that nurtured me, mother of eagles
and men;
Till I stood at last on the crest of the ridge, and look-
ing back over my shoulder,
Saw the sun like a flower of fire break cover and
bloom again.

Startled, the slow, brown sheep rose stumbling out of
the damp, matted grasses
Where they had slept, snuffed wildly, then paused,
then thundered away,
Like a rain-swollen brook that in spring goes roaring
and leaping through new mountain passes;
Startled, I too turned and fled ere the shepherds
could follow and slay.

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Then the days went by like lonely birds, and never a bird went singing;
With hands at my knees I dozed, or watched through the glare of light:
But never a dust-cloud rose on the plain from the feet of messengers bringing
Any word of Saul and his anger to bestir me again to my flight.

And nightly I lay in the moss till I heard the snarling, low cough of the leopard,
All preyless, go seeking at dawn his lair in the innermost hills;
And saw afar, like ants on the slopes, the sheep, trailing after their shepherd,
Go down from the fold to the vale, where the water fell carded in rills.

And I had no task by day but to watch the gray leaves of the olive-tree changing,
And the nestlings take wing from their nests and flutter and fly away;
And watch from the dawn till the dove-colored eve the slow sun steadily ranging,
While a lizard asleep on a stone in the heat was the sun-dial marking my day.

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For I had no flocks to fold at night, or no herds to lead from the mountains
When the wolves came savage with hunger or thieving bands held our ways;
And I had no harp with the wind to vie, or to mate with the music of fountains,
Or contend with the lark when he rose at dawn and sang to the Lord his praise.

So long I had dwelt with men, I had lost the sense of each wild thing's reason;
The wilderness kept its secret, but gave of its dearth and pain:
Yet I hid in the hills, in my fear of the king, till there came that desolate season
When the flocks go down to the lowlands; then I too fled to the plain.

I had fled like a hare from the whim of a king; I had bent like a reed to his passion:
He who rests from endeavor, though just, grows unjust; though right, lives a lie.
So I bend no more, flee no more from him; but strong in the right of my soul, I will fashion
Some shield to withstand his arrow and sword; and win, though I die.

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THE MESSENGER

With God's grace, whence all mercies spring,
The duke's young minstrel said that he
Would bear a message to the king.
The men-at-arms jeered openly,
But those who knew the merry lad
Grew grave, thinking him famine-mad.

But said the duke: "Who goes will die,
And he will die who stays; so go,"
And put the pictured arras by,
And passed in silence with his woe.
But loud the minstrel laughed, and said:
"The road is short unto the dead."

. . . . . .

Theirs was a wild and bare domain,
And neighbor to the barren shore:
There wheeled the gull above the plain,
And hemlocks mocked the salt sea's roar;
Ever the fog came trooping in
The parched and whitened fields to win.

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So flat the realm, one scarce could say
  Where land left off and sea began.
Through all a slow stream wound its way,
  And mile on mile the marshes ran
North, west, and south; but in the east
The sea droned ever like a priest.

One would have called it all too bare
  To tempt marauders: cattle throve,
But like rank weeds, without a care;
  A few sheep fed, a scraggy drove;
A few nets swung upon the bay—
And over all the duke held sway.

Then came the count: why, no one knew.
  Some said their duchess was too fair,
And some, their old lord haply flew
  His petted falcon everywhere,
Which vexed the count. But there he came,
And threatened them with sword and flame.

All June he stormed against their walls;
  With blood their rose-trees blossomed red;
Their bravest lay upon the palls,
  With dirge unsung and mass unsaid:
For priests and choir, to archers grown,
Among the dead were thickly strown.

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Their arrows gone, their children wrought
  Stout bolts, and sharpened them in flame;
Their wives beside them grimly fought;
  Their bowstrings frayed, their maidens came,
And sitting on the ramparts, there
They braided bowstrings of their hair.

Hourly some famine-maddened one
  Leaped screaming from the walls and died;
All day the duke sat in the sun,
  Moving his head from side to side;
He heard the death-watch tick at noon,
And hounds go whimpering at the moon.

Then came that last despairing night:
  The minstrel sauntered forth to ride;
He gaily mounted for his flight;
  They flung the creaking postern wide,
And silent watched his fair face loom
An instant on the outer gloom.

The count's wild crew at supper lay
  All weaponless along his path.
Some stumbled out to block his way,
  While others cursed in helpless wrath;
But turning in his saddle, he
Mocked at them all in jeering glee.

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Fresh from the siege behind grim walls,
He faced the windy road with joy;
He heard a night-bird's strident calls,
And answered like a happy boy,
Glad just to be in open air,
With God's soft twilight everywhere.

And oh, the rhythmic thud of feet
Of his roan steed, his shoulders' thrust,
Making the sense of joy complete;
The curling, coiling clouds of dust,
That, drifting rearward gray and wan,
Made all his past oblivion!

Fair towns beyond those dolorous glades
And bustling courtyards lured him now:
He heard in dreams the praise of maids,
And felt the laurel on his brow;
And saw the people round him throng,
Who rode through death to mend a wrong.

A murmur reached him while he dreamed,
Like puffs of wind before a rain,
As all his fierce pursuers streamed
Behind him in a straggling train.
It grew until the very ground
To him seemed tremulous with sound.

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Then arrows sped about him: some
  Dropped in the grass like meadow-larks;
And some flew past with spiteful hum
  Of angry bees; while two, like sparks,
Stung through the covering of his arm,
But clung there lightly, without harm.

He saw the starved beast he bestrode
  Ill matched those of the count's wild men,
So turned him sharply from the road
  Along the blind ways of the fen.
All winter he had wandered there
With falcon, hunting crane and hare.

It was a swart and gruesome place,
  Where nothing seemed to him aright:
Each still pool was a dead man's face;
  The pallid sky was void of light;
And where the wind went through the flags
A gibbering witch danced in her rags.

He saw slow water-creatures rise
  From out the wrinkling pools, and glare
At him with cold, unmoving eyes.
  There seemed but venom in that stare,
As if they knew his end, and came
Unhurrying, to view his shame.

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A fog had blotted out the sky
And all the dear, familiar stars.
Like one who knows the world is nigh,
Yet sees naught through his prison-bars,
He heard his foemen press around,
And all the marsh astir with sound.

He heard them strive to follow him:
Some gained, but most went wandering
Through dank morasses stark and grim;
He heard their neighing horses spring
Through splashing reaches to their doom;
He heard them calling from the tomb.

Such shadows sprang athwart the place,
He knew not foe from shadow; one,
Trembling, he thrust fair in the face,
And though he felt his good sword run,
Unchecked, untouched, a full yard by,
He paused, expectant of a cry.

He knew not when their shouting ceased,
But suddenly became aware
Of utter hush, wherein his beast
Dragged sucking hoofs across that lair
Of water-rat and newt. Something,
Lost soul or bat, went by awing.

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His path lost, glad to end his woe
And that sick silence holding him,
He yearned to see some valiant foe
Come looming on the night's dun rim,
To end all with one generous thrust,
And leave him sleeping with the just.

Glad if he there might stand at bay,
With all his foemen set around,
Boldly he took his valorous way.
What was that sibilant, low sound?
Was it their leader's cautious "Hist!"
Or serpent's anger, having missed?

The sprawling legs and drooping head
Of his tired steed enraged him so,
That, all his pity being dead,
He struck him many a cruel blow.
As well expect song from dead lark,
Or color from the rose at dark.

He might have been a smitten rock
For any feeling he had shown.
It came upon him with a shock—
This was the petty end, alone
With this spent creature, past desire,
Past dread, past pain, a burnt-out fire.

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Burning to leave the place, he gave
No backward look unto his steed's
Shut eyes and heaving flanks, but clave
The breast-high ranks of hostile reeds.
No creature rustled through the grass;
Even the wind had ceased to pass.

Then hungering for companionship,
He longed to meet some living thing,
Even to see some wild brute slip
Beside him there, or fiercely spring
To blot him out. It grew a hope
That with such creature he might cope.

. . . . . .

It came to be his only care
To win his faithful steed and die,
Cold cheek by jowl beside him there.
In vain: no path could he descry;
The tangled grass, glad to assail
The poor lost creature, left no trail.

Then quicksands seized him, like a thing
Half human, but without a breath
Of human pity. Mad to spring
Beyond that clutch of sordid death,

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He screamed, writhed, prayed, cursed God,
and wept:
The sullen sands their grim hold kept.

This, then, the end of his desire
Of winning glory and renown!
His heart, in impotent, vain fire,
Deemed it of all his woe the crown—
To sink in silence in this glade,
Just to enrich a lizard's shade.

To be bereft of all his sky
And peaceful burial in the sun,
Where men might come, and softly sigh,
And speak of all his glory won—
He whitened as the grim thought came
To pierce his tortured heart with flame.

Then rain fell, little spiteful flings
Out of an impotent, mean heart.
There seemed mere malice in its stings,
As one might throw a headless dart
Into a dead foe, after fight,
When all his friends had taken flight.

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Spent with his frenzy, hands to face,
Down to the sands his forehead fell.
How long he brooded in the place,
With mind benumbed, he could not tell,
But looking up, about to die,
He heard a lark sing in the sky.

He heard a lark sing in the sky
Above the slowly whitening east.
It seemed God's message from on high,
Better than book or bell or priest.
"Not what the lark does, but aspires,
Crowns it," he said; "so my desires.

"The body is but potter's clay,
A blow may shatter into dust.
It passes in a little day;
But soul stays soul: therefore I trust.
The man that I have tried to be
Not even God can take from me."

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CHIVALRY

Low as my lady's state is high,
I lead a life apart,
Yet hopeless love has lifted me
Up to her lonely heart.

A bow-shot from her battlements
There winds our quiet lane;
Beyond its dusty hedge a stream
Slips through the grassy plain.

A wild wind races through the land
And rocks each gnarly tree;
Here wheels the gull, here sweeps the brine,
Here booms the distant sea.

Betimes a village maid trips past,
Or hooded friars nod,
Dreaming, on ambling mules, of ways
That their dear Lord had trod.

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With helm unlaced, at times a knight
  Rides through the languid noon:
As God has granted wish of mine,
  Grant he each fair knight's boon!

Yet I have asked no more than this,
  That I may daily hear
Along our lonely countryside
  Her rein-bells jingling clear;

And nightly in her casement see
  Her candle shine afar,
When through the mist, athwart mine eyes,
  It glimmers like a star.

Joy has no wings for me; no grief
  Can plunge me in despair:
I keep the level ways of those
  Who pray, yet need not prayer.

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ULYSSES GROWN OLD

His windows open to the sun,
And all his house is warm and sweet
With April, yet such strange chills run
Through his shrunk form and palsied feet
He thinks that winter has begun.

All day the far seas beckon him,
The hollow waves roar round his isle;
But he who longed to pass the rim
Of all the known, content the while,
Sits in a corner cramped and dim.

Betimes his vacant features shine
As some faint murmur from the shore,
Or whiff from off the blowing brine,
Stirs his lost thoughts; a moment more
Four walls make his horizon-line.

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He has no memory of the past;
  He recks him not of time to come;
Child-eyed he wonders at the blast,
  Or cowers when the wild bees hum
And darting birds their shadows cast.

Careless of how the days are sped,
  His mind is like a palace wan,
With ghostly talk between the dead,
  Where one dim candle flickers on,
And all the happy guests have fled.

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ROMANCE

AGAIN my king would sail away,
  Because the land was tame,
And foes there met were wisps of hay
  Unto his heart of flame.

All day from his high lattices
  He watched the tumbling sea:
The maidens of the sculleries
  Went down the lanes in glee;

The young brown reapers lolled afield;
  The cattle stood in stall;
The watchman slept beneath his shield,
  Upon the sunlit wall.

The princess and a page between
  The ranks where lilies flower,
Leaning below the lilies' screen,
  With kisses marked the hour.

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Yet heedless from his lattices
The king still looked without:
The north wind blowing in the trees
Was like a battle-shout;

Betimes he thought the leafy lane
Broke white before the blast;
Betimes a gull's wing in the rain
Seemed like a slanting mast.

He rose and passed the seneschal,
Who followed in a dream
And let the unseen beakers fall
And let the wine-butts stream.

He led his comrades to the sand.
Eager and old as he,
They launched their bark, and left the land
In sweet discovery.

Seaward they drove: the roaring main
Leaped up to meet the rail;
Loud shrilled the blast, loud rang the rain
Upon the windy sail.

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And seething waves joined in the race;
  Like horses wild with pain,
They set the ship a madman's pace
  And shook each whitened mane.

Where broke the tall wave-crests of green
  They saw their old gods go;
To them the hidden was the seen,
  And one were weal and woe.

The vaporous coasts they ever fled,
  The purple isles they passed;
Dearer to them the way that led
  Into the stinging blast.

And dear the black flaws on the lee,
  And dear the sleeted rain;
For them the wide, mysterious sea
  Was still their best domain.

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THE JOURNEY

At night, when myrtle bells aswing
Fill the bare places round the spring
With ghostly whispers, and the moon
Makes midnight like a ghostly noon;

When even flitter-mice are still;
Then little folk troop down the hill
Into the gardens poets keep
Hard by the pleasant town of Sleep.

Their torches flare; their dance is set
Between five stalks of mignonette.
Then armèd gallants click the heel
And bow to dames who wait the reel.

Such dames! There has not been such grace
Since all the wood-nymphs left the place:
They courtesy, pause, and circle round
Upon the sward, yet make no sound.

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Long since I quite forgot to dance,
I have no need for sword or lance,
But I would follow close at hand
When they set out for fairy-land.

No doubt it is a tiresome flight:
The path runs up, there is no light,
And on sheer heights one hears the beat
Of water far beneath his feet.

And in still valleys dark and dim
He hears his own voice calling him;
And his own shadow is a flame
That passes back the road he came.

Once there, I 'm sure I 'd find good cheer,—
Indeed, I might remain a year,—
And haply I might learn to know
If some strange things we hear are so.

I 'd like to know if it be true
Of Cinderella's coach and shoe;
If sly Queen Mab yet mends her ways;
And where the fair Kilmeny strays.

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I 'd sit with Merlin in his ring,
And listen to the talking spring;
Or hear the magic-throated bird
Sing round the pool that Kynon stirred.

I have not seen them yet,—have you?—
But some night, through the falling dew,
We 'll leave the pleasant town of Sleep
And deftly on the dancers creep.

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IN EXILE

Some day I may retake the road
To dreamland's sweet oblivion,
Though now I keep my bare abode
In streets my late companions shun.

To nooks below the greenwood tree
They call and call; in sweet disguise
Of bloom and song they beckon me,
And lure me in each maiden's eyes.

But nights they leave their haunts and throng
About me. When my tasks are done—
Some day—I 'll put them into song,
And find my happy country won.

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Félix. Turn from me, dear, that I may see your face
As first I saw it on that day in spring
When we began this tangled web of ours.
No; just a little farther—so; that 's it;
And lift your eyes up to that red-tiled roof
Where sit the pigeons dozing in the sun.
Ah, that is right; and there 's the grave half-smile
That curves the left half of your perfect lips
Above their fellow-half, all tenderness.
That was the sweet irregularity
That won my second look, and so won me,
That day, when, coming from the fishing-fleet,
I first saw you, and dreamed that life began.
Stay! Do not move yet! Let me drink it in—
The round, slim throat, browned by our Southern sun,
The dark hair falling to the half-shut eyes,
That seemed deep pools where Truth might dwell within;

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The small, round chin, full-tilted in its pride;
And all the fair, indubitable grace
Of your slim presence dawning full on me,
As day breaks with us out of sudden night.

Adrienne. I know the day. I thought you overbold,
And flushed a little, and then slowly smiled,
Seeing you saw me, and yet saw me not.

Félix. Ah, that is true. I thought I saw your soul
Glow in the doubtful beauty of your face —
A water-lily on the half-seen pool.
Yes, that I cling to: it was first your soul
That drew me to you; it was pure and white —
Like moonlight shining on the waterways,
Like day when it first breaks a flower of flame
Above the cool hills where God sits enthroned,
Like heaven itself—all that your soul was like.
And then I woke to all your beauty, dear—
Eyes, lips, and face—that perfect face that seemed
Kin to the lilies that our young girls bear
To their strange first communion in the spring.
Then you, you grew my sun, my stars, my all,
A lamp to light my hastening footsteps home,
My dream of heaven and my last thought at night,
The thought that marked the coming of each day.

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Adrienne. I know you said such things to me that I
Grew vexed at first, and sometimes half afraid.
And Marie waited for you; she should hear
The things you said: I had no right to know.

Félix. Oh, Marie, Marie! Why now use that foil
To parry words that I must say to you?
We never loved; she was my friend, and I
Less than a brother, little more than friend
One meets with smiles, and passes, and forgets.

Adrienne. It was not right to love you, thinking she—

Félix. Ah, what is right to love? Love is a tide
That sweeps us on through strange abysmal deeps,
Sight, feeling, soul all lost in that one sense,
Half agony, half joy, of being borne
All unresisting by resistless force.
I had the right to love you, as my soul
Aspired to heaven, as plants turn to the sun,
As little rivers run into the sea:
I loved you with the hopes, joys, fears, desires
Of all my future woven into dreams.
I loved you purely, as men kneel to pray;
I loved you humbly, as they talk with God;
I loved you with the strength of steadfast things—

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Rocks, mountains, seas, and the serene, high stars;
I loved you, and shall love you till I die.

Adrienne. Oh, you are true! I know that you are good,
And all my heart is torn—

Félix. But not with love.
You seemed to give what you gave not at all.
Oh, you who mask all your indifference
Under shy speech and gentle, intimate ways,
The heart of sorrow follows after you,
And through the guarded nunnery of your soul
Strange ghosts must walk at times to vex your peace.
God rights us in the end, and gives to you
No skill in judging men. Oh, you shall find
Your love grown loveless, and how hard the road
That burns beneath the feet of the deceived!

Adrienne. Oh, you are cruel, cruel! I was cold,
And told you so. I said I had no heart.

Félix. You said you had no heart, yet showed your heart.
You know the time they thought our boats were lost,
But I came to you through the streaming rain,

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And found you standing by the sounding shore,
Your wet gown blown about you and your eyes
All dark with straining through the windy dusk.
You breathed a little sob, and your white hands
Leaped up to me, as all your body did.
You loved me then, oh, say you loved me then!

Adrienne. I do not know. I know that I was glad
Who had been frightened. It was pitiful
That all should go into the hungry sea,
That takes so many from us, young and old.
Oh, do not ask me, for I cannot tell!

Félix. You know the day that we went down the road—
The white road past Les Martiques to the coast,
And sat upon the sands all afternoon,
And watched the fishing-boats turn dark or white,
Like wind-blown flowers, as they tacked in the sun.
The mistral blew and blew, and white spray leaped
To rainbow-blooms from every toppling wave;
The surf made pleasant music to your speech—
Shy, doubtful speech that seemed to tell me all.
I took your hand; you did not seem to know,
Or did not mind—which was it, dear? For me
Life brimmed with joy that day alone with you
Beside the sounding sea. We go there now.

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Adrienne. I cannot go. My mother waits for me.
To-morrow is a feast-day, as you know,
And I have much to do. I cannot go.

Félix. To-morrow is to-morrow; this, to-day.
See how the road is white, as it was then;
The mistral blows again, as on that day;
The orchards are in bloom. It hurts my heart
To see them make such show of joyousness:
The world should be in gloom, to match my thoughts.
The sea is better—moans with broken heart.
That 's like the true sea: it meets every mood;
Oh, there will be no rainbow-blooms to-day.

Adrienne. I cannot go; I hate this barren place.

Félix. We 'll go upon the sea, then. Here 's a boat,
Small, it is true, and mean, but well enough
For placid waters, and this last sad time.
And I will row you out, and laugh, and talk
Of trivial things, and feign that we again
Live only in each other's hearts and eyes.
One lock of your dark hair has fallen, dear,
Over your rounded cheek. Brush it away.
I 'd have no curtain 'twixt me and my heaven.

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Adrienne. I came against my wish. The wind is cold;
The sea is dolorous; I would return.
I like not dismal places, dismal things.
There 's nothing here but sand and sea and sea;
But over there the town lies, and it laughs;
And I might sit within my mother's court
And hear the people passing in the street—
The happy people who break not their hearts.

Félix. Oh, you are cruel, as all women are,
And doubly so to those who love in vain.
They pour their hearts out for you, cherish you,
And then, some day, grown weary of it all,
You drop your mask, and all is at an end.
Oh, I have loved you! Say it is a dream
That you can never love me in return,
And that your eyes, fair stars of tenderness,
Will never light me home, your perfect lips
Whisper to me in silver iterance
The changeless words that happy lovers hear.

Adrienne. I cannot love you; it is all in vain.

Félix. Oh, you—you are so little, yet so hard!
So tender, yet unyielding! See these hands,
All brown and sinewy from the Mother Sea,

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How easily might I crush out your life,
And leave you white and soulless on the sands,
No more to be a snare unto the heart.
But you will trip back through the hot sunshine,
Into the pleasant town, and chat and laugh,
And sit within your mother's court, and dream
Of other lovers who will follow me,
And match their tenderness with tender eyes.
I cannot bear it; I had rather go
Into the dark vault where the damned go hushed
With bent brows brooding on unending woes,
Lacking the comfort both to hear and tell,
Since sympathy died in them at the door.

Adrienne. Oh, you would be a coward, then, and take
The life God gave you for a little thing
Who did not know her own heart! Oh, be brave!
No day yet closed because a woman's eyes
Shone not with love, or that her happy feet
Went ever up and down another's stairs.

Félix. Oh, you would taunt me thus who gave you all,
And cast my love beneath your feet, and boast
That you will travel on another's stairs!
It shall not be! Rather I 'd take your hand,

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And lead you down to dark oblivion.
See where the far town drowses in its peace,
And meadows bask in light. The radiant blue
Of sea and sky shall change not, though you 're dead,
And all the sea be blue above your grave.
Look to them all, and come to other dreams.
In far, strange fields of dolor you and I
Shall wander henceforth like a driven cloud,
Blown by the winds of dark regret and woe.
Yet had I rather go through hell with you
Than roam alone the fields of paradise.
Some flame from my great passion yet shall burn
The barriers of your vast indifference,
And something in your eyes shall wake for me
And make hell heaven. Oh, time is strong, and I
Will lavish all eternity to gain
The look you gave me once, but now deny.

Adrienne. Oh, pity me! I am too young to sink
In endless darkness in the silly sea.
And just this morning I was also glad
And sang about my tasks. Oh, pity me!

Félix. It is for pity I would have you go,
Youth on your brow and beauty in your eyes.
The years would bow you to the Mother Earth,

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And make your form the sport of every pain,
And withered like an apple that the snow
Finds still upon the bough. Better that Death
Should make your grace immortal, and in hell
Lost souls should see you and forget their woe.

Adrienne. Oh, mock me not! It is so sweet to live.
The years are slow, and age is far away.
My mother's eyes are bright, and she yet laughs,
And she is old, or older far than I.
I like not vexing thoughts. Yours make me sad,
With reckoning ever with the wearing years.
You said you loved me and my happy eyes,
Yet see them now all tremulous with tears,
And dark with that which darkly threatens them.
You would not harm me—you who loved me so.
Oh, say you would not, for you frighten me!

Félix. For mine own sake I would not lift a hand
Against you, dear, though God commanded it.
That I have reaped not love, but only scorn,
Or that cool look of yours that 's less than scorn,
I could pass by, but this is different.
From your false self I needs must save yourself.
You loved me once, I know you loved me once,
And love that budded here shall bloom elsewhere,

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In hell, perhaps; but it shall surely bloom.
The rose will not turn lily—not with love.
Now fickleness has tried to make your rose
Into a lily. Ah, I know the one
Of whom you dream to wear upon your heart.
I saw you greet him in the market-place
As I was idling there. Oh, such a look!
Eyes, cheek, and brow all spoke before the lips
Could utter that soft, rolling name of his.
You only spoke his name? What need of more
When all your heart leaped to your lifted eyes,
And love upon your white brow seemed impressed
As clear as if God stooped to write it there?
God stooped, I say? No, God would never stoop
To write a lie upon a woman's face.
My rose shall bloom yet, little matter where.
Now it may be that in some other world,
When we two, all alone, come fresh from pain
Of fruitless living, coming all alone,
And sick for home, through our own loneliness
May feel heart leap to heart, as once of old,
And walk through fields of fair forgetfulness.
Oh, love! let us forget! What is hell for,
And all these faults of ours that harrow us,
But just to be the stairs by which we rise?
Come, love, we mount!

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Adrienne. Oh, take me to my home!
My mother needs me, and my heart is sore
With thinking of the days that are to be
When my feet go not in and out her door.
She loved you always, thought you strong and brave;
Yet you would fling her joy unto the sea,
That she shall hear moan ever at her gate,
And watching while I come not, hear my sob
Harrow the night for her in every wind,
And move along the shingle with each wave.
What peace in heaven or hell could come to you,
Knowing she thought that you had died to save
What you had slain? Oh, heavy is the chain
That you shall drag through all eternity!
My face beside you yet shall come to be
Hell's sharpest sting, that you would fain forget,
Yet cannot. Take me home!

Félix. Oh, say no more!
I give it up—all. You shall have your way.
Your face a sting? I know not. It might be.
God reaches far to punish. It might be
Even to hell. It might be. I know not.
But sting! Ah, that thought brings you safely home!

Adrienne. My mother trusted you, not knowing this;
But I shall trust you, knowing, all my days.

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Félix. I heed not trust or distrust: all I ask
Is now to be forgotten and forget.

Adrienne. I shall forget the false and hold the true:
'T was madness, and not you, that threatened me.

Félix. What I have thought my soul cannot deny;
What dreamed, though unfulfilled, is still the soul:
God tests the balance with such little things.

Adrienne. Vex not yourself with any ill undone
Or wrong frustrated: good is good, wrong, wrong,
And men through both mount up to better things.
God 's not a huckster chaffering for men's souls.

Félix. Now may I mount till I forget the past
And all that grace of yours that made it dear!
Oh, I will be a miser with my love,
And hoard my thoughts, and live on meager fare,
Starving my heart with dear vacuities!
I 'll meet your eyes no more, nor think of you,
Or think but harshly, as of forsworn things,
And steel my mood, reiterating wrongs.
I 'll live love down.

Adrienne. Then I am well content.
But now why row so furiously? Am I—

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Félix. I would that I were home.

Adrienne. Your face is white,
The sun is gone, and something like a mist
Blots out the land and mingles with the sea.
Is it the rain?

Félix. Yes, wind and driving rain.

Adrienne. Is there then danger that you whiten so?

Félix. There ever is with women and the sea.

Adrienne. Yet men have loved us ever. Something good
Lies in these sweet and dangerous ways of ours.

Félix. Else had we never stayed to be deceived.

Adrienne. Oh, I must laugh because I would not weep;
There 's dread within your face and in that sound
Like far-off horsemen galloping this way.
Oh, I would hide my eyes, yet do not dare;
Cover my ears, were doubt not darker still:
The darkened silence hides more fearsome things

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Than this gray waste and this strange, ominous sky.
Look, not a ripple stirs the waiting sea;
And yet I thought a moment since I felt
A puff of wind blow cool across my face.
Oh, look, oh, see how that white wall sweeps down,
And all the air is clamorous with the gale!

Félix. The storm 's upon us! No—oh, do not rise!
Crouch lower, here, and I will hold your hands.
We 're in God's now, and can but wait the end.

Adrienne. The end? What end? Must we two then now die?

Félix. What end? God knows; but you must surely live.
Oh, you must live to smile this venture down,
And tell your children's children of the day
One stormed your peace until a Greater's storm
Swept him, in turn, to his abiding peace.

Adrienne. If I can still be saved, then why not you?

Félix. The sea is rising; soon the boat will fill
And turn us in the sea. Before I go
I 'll bind you fast. You see this little rope?
That 's your brave stair to lead you back to life.

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Adrienne. But you—you too must climb with me to life.
I cannot go alone. This wild, cold sea—
It frightens me. Oh, leave me not alone!
With you near me I might be almost glad.
See, I can smile a little, almost laugh,
Now you 're beside me.

Félix. Dear, I cannot stay.
My weight would drag us down. A changing wind
Or passing ship will bring you to the shore.
Think not of me; I have no more the wish
To wander up and down our streets and know
The people smile and whisper as I pass,
And that it irks you but to see my face
Pass like a cloud across your happy day.
Do dead men struggle and put forth their power,
And sing within those withered hearts of theirs?
Can I clasp air, and live upon the smile
You give another? No, I long since died,
And strength has passed from me, and all desire.

Adrienne. But see, the mists rise. Surely that is land!

Félix. Like some grim, crouching beast, to see my end.

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Adrienne. Rather to beckon you and give you strength.

Félix. The far-off happy land where I have walked
In happy dreams of you. Oh, it is well
That it should rise again, a coast of dreams,
For I shall tread its unreal paths no more.

Adrienne. No dream, but real. Now the storm will pass.

Félix. See that cold shimmer on the distant sea?
That 's wind and more wind. Worse is yet to come.

Adrienne. Not worse, but better. Take my hands again.
I 'll lift you into life. I have the strength,
And we shall walk together all our days.

Félix. I also have the strength to say you no.
Remember this of me in days to come:
He might have touched my hands, my eyes, my lips,
But would not; and he might have gained my love,
Through pity, bartered for a lonely death,
Yet turned away, in loneliness to die.
Think not I blame you—not for one small thing.

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If I have said hard things and cruel things,
That 's but the man in me. At bottom I
Knew you were blameless, knew that you were wise.
Like some tired child, far from its mother's arms,
With hands that grope for hers, I 'll sink to sleep.

Adrienne. But you will try my little stair with me?

Félix. No, no; a thousand noes. You need not ask.

Adrienne. But look! The coast is blotted out again! Is this the end?

Félix. I fear so! Where 's the rope?

Adrienne. I cast it in the sea!

Félix. You—you! Oh, lost!

Adrienne. Not lost, but won. I take the stair with you.

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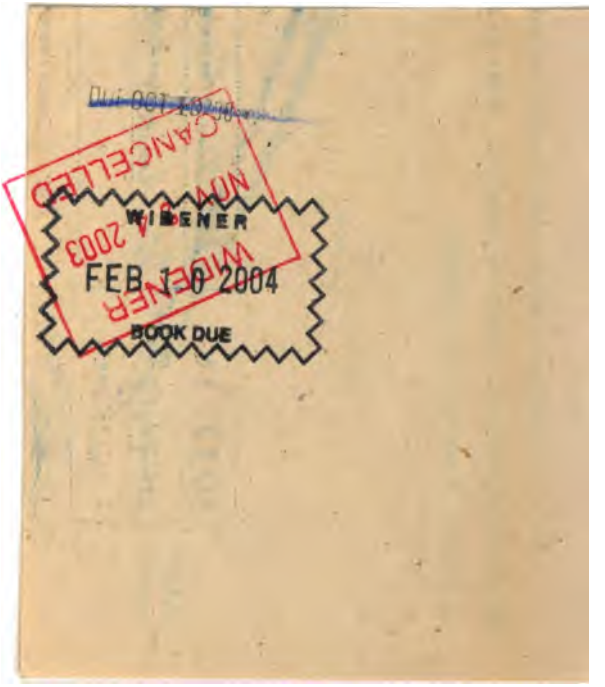

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